

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF  
THE ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVATIONIST EMPLOYEES (A.C.E.)  
BEFORE THE  
CALIFORNIA PERFORMANCE REVIEW COMMISSION  
HEARING TO BE HELD SEPTEMBER 9, 2004  
AT THE NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM, LOS ANGELES, CA**

The Association of Conservationist Employees (A.C.E.) greatly appreciates the commitment of the California Performance Review Commission to holding public hearings to listen to the ideas and perspectives of Californians regarding the ideas and initiatives proposed in your report.

A.C.E. is an organization comprised of California Conservation Corps line staff and is providing the Commission with this written testimony to share our vision and ideas in accomplishing the reorganization of the California Conservation Corps (CCC). It is the desire of A.C.E. to work with the Commission to ensure that the CCC is placed within an appropriate structure and to ensure that the issues and problems plaguing the CCC are corrected.

A.C.E. is submitting this testimony and the attached document as a means of providing the Commission with detail regarding our proposal to create the California Human Development Corps which would consolidate the CCC with other youth development/ public service agencies. We believe our approach is similar to the Commission's recommendations to consolidate the CCC into the California Service Corps and offer our experiences and perspectives in working with the Commission regarding this very important issue.

A.C.E. will also be testifying at the September 9 hearing in Los Angeles County and welcomes the opportunity to begin dialoguing with the Commission regarding the most effective approach for reforming the CCC, and for creating an effective and efficient entity that consolidates existing youth development and public service programs.

Thank you. For more information, please contact Bill Martinez, President, A.C.E., P.O. Box 624674, Tahoe, CA, (530) 545-0091.

## **Memorandum**

**To:** Bill Martinez, ACE

**From:** Arnoldo Torres, Partner  
Torres and Torres Policy Consultants

**RE:** California Human Development Corp.

**Date:** May 15, 2004

Per our previous conversations and those I have had with legislative staff including Senate Budget Committee and Department of Finance, I have prepared the following concept proposal for your review and for distribution and discussion with key policy and budget staff. This is ACE's approach to dealing with budget reductions that are being considered that no doubt further erode the ability of the CCC to effectively carry out its original mission.

### **Proposal to Create the California Human Development Corps.**

We propose creating the California Human Development Corps to combine the California Conservation Corps (CCC), Go Serve, and the Governor's Mentoring Program into one department with focus on public projects and youth development. This idea presents very unique opportunities for great success but requires that individuals with real understanding and commitment be selected to come together and create a new path. By combining these three programs and entities we create a continuum of opportunity for youth to develop and contribute to vital needs and interests of California.

**Governor's Mentoring Program** – Under our proposal, the Governor's Mentoring Program mission would remain intact and serve as the major source of outreach and recruitment for the California Conservation Corps. and AmeriCorps. The mentoring program currently in the ADP has not received the focus and attention it should in terms of the potential it has for assisting at-risk youth, youth with a need for an additional parent model, and youth who are seeking support and assistance outside of the home. Its potential has never been realized and yet provides a statewide network of mentoring initiatives and volunteers. In the last year, it has been a waste of potential and interest.

By placing it as the gateway to the California Conservation Corps. and AmeriCorps, we would be sending a message to the target youth populations that there is a continuum of support and opportunity that will assist you and is available for you should you need it after your mentoring experience. We would be providing a system that does not exist in any other state in the nation, and addressing a key issue concerning youth development---providing a continuum of support and assistance that most experts concede has been sorely lacking in dealing with the target population identified above.

**California Conservation Corps (CCC)** - By placing the CCC in this key position, and with a refocus on youth development, we resurrect the original mission of providing opportunity and assistance to at-risk youth seeking a way out of their environs. Clearly, you are aware of the original intent of the CCC which was to take youth out of their troubled environment, expose them to wilderness regions and engage them in worthwhile environmental projects while providing them further education and skills development. It was hailed as an innovative and unique idea and approach for dealing with at-risk youth and environmental needs. To this day, the State of California benefits from the positive image the CCC provides within and outside the state, yet the program in its actual operation is very far from realizing its original mission.

By reorganizing into the California Human Development Corps. it provides a major opportunity to have the Governor and Legislature understand the realities of a failed leadership of the CCC over the last fifteen years if not longer. The legislature has responded as expected to the representations of administrations that the CCC is in fact the same entity that they have heard and read about. It has not been interested in hearing and listening to the serious deviations its leadership has embarked during these many years. Educational programs are virtually non-existent, CCC environmental projects are generated not based on environmental significance or skills development as originally envisioned, but are now viewed as “not what you learn but what you earn”, there is little if any program attention concerning youth development, projects are generated based on, and it has become a bureaucracy heavy laden with management while actual corps member participation and numbers have been reduced significantly.

Reorganization in this context provides perhaps the last opportunity for the CCC to effectively fulfill its original mission.

**AmeriCorps** - Because this is a federal program and relatively new, the proposed new structure would provide the opportunity to elevate the attention and focus on an extremely worthwhile program that can in fact be the last major step for at-risk youth as they prepare to enter the world of work on their own. It is a fitting program with social purpose and significance for developing youth and young adults who have a value system of contributing to society.

At the same time, this program provides an additional opportunity to provide young adults and others to contribute to worthwhile projects in their communities and throughout California. It can serve as a foundation for stimulating greater volunteerism among the populace by having an on-going campaign that highlights the contributions and importance of AmeriCorps projects.

In our review of other state initiatives in the nation on youth development, there is nothing that resembles this proposal primarily because there is no state commitment to a mentoring program, nor does any other state have the equivalent of a CCC. However, it is imperative that certain other elements accompany this initiative if it is to be successful and effective as we envision.

Mentoring must be better funded in terms of staff resources focusing on the development of mentoring programs and linking with other statewide efforts. By reorganizing with the CCC and AmeriCorps this provides the opportunity to utilize the resources utilized poorly by the CCC to conduct outreach and recruitment. The combination coupled with a more focused and developed purpose provides the necessary elements for success.

The CCC must have a new commitment to returning to its original mission of providing education, youth and skill development, while working on worthwhile environmental projects. In order to accomplish this there must be leadership that fully understands and is committed to this effort. One of the first initiatives must be to restructure the CCC away from multiple management levels. These levels and positions have been created largely to justify the desires of long term managers seeking better standing and income. This has been done over the last ten years while actual corps participants have either remained flat or have been reduced significantly.

At the same time, the educational programs have been virtually eliminated. If not eliminated, their educational purpose and merit has been significantly watered down. Corps member attainment of GED's has not increased but rather has decreased. In fact, the educational institution that CCC has partnered with---Muir Charter School---is not an accredited charter school. As a consequence, corps members receiving any certification from Muir cannot use it because it is from an institution which is not accredited. An examination of these two areas would confirm our contention that before you reorganize they must be restructured in order to give the new approach a better chance of success. Without these changes the infrastructure necessary for success will be non-existent.

Additionally and perhaps even more important is the understanding that upper management of the CCC has in fact been the real constant that has brought about this aberration in the CCC. While directors of the CCC have held the leadership position of this agency, it is upper management that has helped prepare and manage the daily operations of the CCC over the last fifteen years. They have been the constant and as a consequence they are largely the problem today. An examination of personnel actions and restructuring would confirm that actions against personnel not in support of "management clicks" have suffered unfair personnel actions and these same "management clicks" have benefited from promotions and transfers from exempt positions to newly created upper management positions within the CCC. We would strongly urge the State Personnel Board (SPB) to undertake an examination/investigation of how Human Resources at CCC has conducted itself in these circumstances.

Lastly, it is imperative that permanent arrangements and mechanism be established with other departments within Resources to insure that the CCC secures environmental projects in order to fulfill its mission and objectives. Such arrangements must have criteria that include them being cost-effective, skill development for corps members, and environment enhancing and/or natural resource development. A good example of cost-effectiveness is the utilization of prison inmates as fire suppression crews with Department of Forestry. This arrangement is based on a MOU between DOF and Corrections and is lauded as the most effective manner of fighting fires. However, a

closer examination of this argument confirms that the overtime utilized by management and correction guards to supervise prison inmate crews, as well the personnel costs for transporting these crews to fire sights, results in high costs that are not discussed publicly nor factored into budget analyses and hearings. We do not argue that only CCC crews should be utilized, but rather we are arguing that we should develop a more cost-effective approach of when we use prison inmates and the need to use CCC crews as well.

In other words, there is an institutional bias within the Resource Agency that has historically hurt the efforts of the CCC. The CCC has historically been considered the “illegitimate child” of the Resource Agency and rather than having the relationship working together and assisting youth at CCC to gain skills and contribute, DOF has taken an opposite mentality and action.

These are some of the elements that must accompany this restructuring if it is to be successful and measurably better than what we currently experience. In addition, we firmly believe that there should be a philanthropic entity in this new structure which can take advantage of the extensive opportunities we believe exist in developing public-private partnerships and projects between the California Human Development Corps and philanthropic institutions not only in California but in the nation. There is a great deal of interest and funding opportunities for such visionary efforts/ initiatives as this that deal with youth development. The clear benefits can also be measured in taking potentially dangerous youth and giving them an extremely productive life. We are convinced that these are very solid and viable messages that will bring about new relationships and funding.

Lastly, we also believe it is imperative that the corps members and AmeriCorps have access to primary health care services and be eligible for Medi-Cal if necessary. There are networks of state funded non-profit community health centers that are in place in virtually every CCC sight as well as AmeriCorp placements. These health clinics are an ideal partner to provide the preventive outpatient medical services that are often times needed by these participants. We firmly believe that coverage of these participants can be accomplished at little cost or in fact can be covered through outside funding.

## **CONCLUSION**

However this initiative is discussed Bill, it must be clear that this is not a union/CAUSE issue. Clearly, our participation has not been in this context, but it is imperative that everyone understand that this is not ACE’s agenda. We believe this proposal is what you and many others we have spoken to over the years have argued that the CCC must become again. The CCC has never had a sustained commitment to its original mission but for the initial four to five years. Since then we have been in a steady and consistent decline in the values, commitment and mission of a brilliant and most worthwhile concept and program. The California Human Development Corps. allows us to not only resurrect the CCC, but provides for that unique opportunity to create a broader initiative aimed at at-risk youth which after all is the original target population of the legislation that created the CCC and is a population group that continues to be in need of assistance.

[rtcomp:c:md/t&t/clients2001/ace: CHDC – Proposal to create 5-14-04]